

The Computer Records System

A truly effective Alumni Association requires many tools, but few are more important than a computerized records system.

The Mohawk College Alumni Association, through a combination of good luck and good timing, has at its disposal one of the most comprehensive and technologically advanced Alumni records systems in Canada.

When we began laying the foundation for our Association last spring, it became obvious that computerizing the records of our 18,000 Alumni was essential. The big questions were how to do it, when, and for how much.

It was found that the records of about 10,000 Alumni were already stored on a computer tape and the information could be obtained by running the tape on the College's large I.B.M. computer. Updating these files was possible through a batch-card system.

There were, however, two problems. First, each file contained only the graduate's name, address, telephone number, program, year of graduation and student number. Because of the need to reacquire each Alumnus with the College and enlist his or her support for the Association much more was required. Secondly, these files could not be updated quickly and easily by the Alumni Office and Computer Services Division.

The obvious solution was to go to an on-line computer system; one in which each file could be called up on a video display terminal screen, updated as required and returned to storage.

There were, as it was quickly discovered, several different ways to accomplish this. The easiest, yet most costly, method was to buy a complete system, such as the one developed by Jeffrey Shy and Associates of Williamsburg, Virginia, at a cost of about \$120,000. Another method examined was buying a small microcomputer such as an I.B.M. Personal or Apple, along with sufficient storage capacity and specialized programming, at a minimum cost of \$25,000. A third alternative was to have the College's Computer Services Division staff do the programming and operate the system through Mohawk's large Hewlett-Packard computer via a video display terminal.

Just as these alternatives were identified, Lady Luck interceded on the Association's behalf.

In August, the Computer Services Division was given a new software package to try out. This package, known in the trade as Speedware, allows programmers to design on-line systems in days, not months.

The heart of this package is a new computer language called GENASYS, short for Generate A System. Devised by Info-Centre of Montreal for Hewlett-Packard Computers, the beauty of the Speedware package is that it requires a programmer only to tell the machine what to do. Programming in older computer languages such as COBOL or BASIC requires the programmer to tell the machine what to do AND how to do it. It is the need to build in the step-by-step logic of performing a task that makes programming in these older languages so time-consuming compared to working in GENASYS.

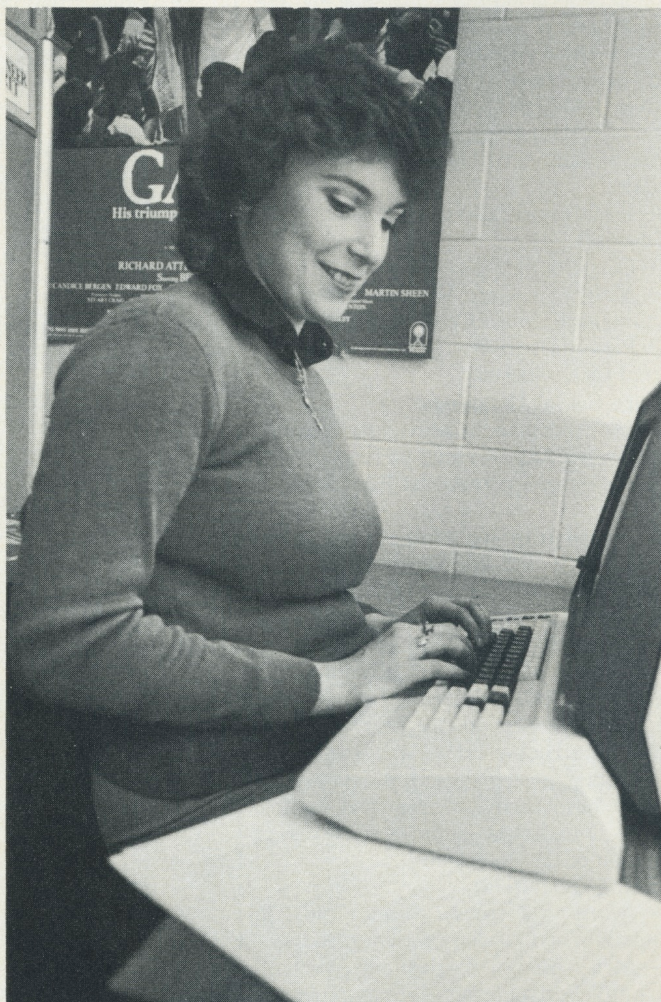
It was the Alumni Association's good fortune that Don Mason, a 1975 Data Processing grad, was one of two Mohawk programmers who were asked to try out the new Speedware. The trial project Mr. Mason chose was a computerized Alumni records system.

Using the basic information an Alumni Association would keep on its graduates, Mr. Mason designed a rudimentary records system, complete with screens, in one week.

After more discussions with the Alumni Office staff, the system he designed was expanded and refined to include much more information. The final product allows the association to store the following on each graduate, once located:

- Name
- Maiden Name
- Address
- Student Number
- Program
- Year of Graduation
- Occupation
- Employer's Name and Address
- Home and Business Telephone Numbers
- Student and Alumni Life Activities
- Other Schools Attended and Degrees/Diplomas Received
- Names and Birthdates of three Children
- Donations History

Lists of Alumni, sorted according to many of the above criteria can be produced. These are of great value to many other College departments such as Co-operative Education



The Terminal — operated by Marie (Riuli) Mildenerberger, Alumni Secretary. (Business Secretarial grad '83)